

## Ethics And Information Security Issues In Gonzo Journalism

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### Abstract

This article presents an in-depth analysis of ethical principles and information security issues in gonzo journalism. Because the gonzo style departs from traditional journalistic norms and relies on the author's personal involvement, emotional tone, and subjective views, it often conflicts with ethical and legal norms. This raises questions of journalistic responsibility, factual accuracy, the reliability of sources, and their safety. The article examines the ethical boundaries of gonzo journalism in the context of international legal norms (UN resolutions, UNESCO principles, Council of Europe documents) and national legislative requirements. It also analyzes the positive and negative consequences of a subjective approach based on real-life examples from the television program "Millar." The research findings provide scientific evidence that ensuring a balance between ethics and information security in gonzo journalism is essential for the sustainable development of journalism.

**Keywords:** gonzo journalism, ethical principles, journalistic ethics, information security, international legal norms, national press, journalistic responsibility, subjectivity.

Gonzo journalism is characterized by a free style, subjective approach, and provocative tone. Therefore, the development of this style not only expands the creative possibilities of journalism but also raises certain ethical and information security issues. While traditional journalism emphasizes accuracy and impartiality of facts, in gonzo journalism, the author creates material based on personal experiences, ironic interpretations, and subjective views. This sometimes increases the likelihood of information manipulation, misleading audiences, or exacerbating social tensions. Furthermore, in the digital space, with the frequent dissemination of gonzo journalism on social media, questions of personal data privacy, the risk of fake news, and the balance between free speech and moral responsibility become pressing. From this perspective, gonzo journalism should be studied not only from the perspective of creative practice but also

from the perspective of ethics, norms, and information security.

Before moving on to a practical analysis, it is necessary to consider this issue in the context of international and national legal norms. Understanding the correspondence or differences between international norms and national legislation allows for a more complete understanding of the ethical and information security issues associated with gonzo journalism. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948, states that all human beings are born free, equal in dignity and rights, while Article 12 establishes that there is no inviolability of privacy, home, or correspondence, and prohibits unlawful attacks on a person's honor and reputation.<sup>1</sup> This standard serves as a key source for covering information security issues related to the protection of personal data and privacy in gonzo journalism. Furthermore, Article 8 of the Council of Europe Convention on Human

<sup>1</sup> United Nations. (1948, December 10). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. – URL: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

Rights and Fundamental Freedoms guarantees the inviolability of private and family life and stipulates that state intervention may only be carried out on a lawful and democratic basis.<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of journalistic ethics, the "Declaration of International Principles of Journalistic Ethics," adopted in Paris and Prague in 1983, obliges journalists to respect the truth, provide the audience with reliable information, and refrain from actions that violate the honor and reputation of an individual.<sup>3</sup> These documents ensure that creative independence in gonzo journalism is balanced with ethical and legal standards, and shed light on the complex balance between personal data, the threat of fake news, and journalistic responsibility. Furthermore, documents adopted by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) and the OSCE (the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) are also important for addressing issues of information security and journalistic responsibility in gonzo journalism. For example, the UNESCO Declaration on the Safety of Journalists emphasizes the importance of protecting journalists from threats and dangers arising in the course of their professional work.<sup>4</sup> This standard is relevant when covering situations where journalists work in dangerous conditions and put their personal safety at risk. The UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Journalists also establishes the principles of freedom, objectivity, and

professional ethics for journalists.<sup>5</sup> Gonzo allows journalists to combine creative independence with adherence to ethical and legal standards. In addition, the OSCE Freedom of Information Guidelines regulate freedom of information and the personal responsibility of journalists.<sup>6</sup> This document can be used to analyze the issues gonzo journalism faces regarding the safety of posts and content shared on social media. The main legal and regulatory documents regulating the information sector and journalism in Uzbekistan play an important role in analyzing the issues of ethics and information security of gonzo journalism. First, the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan guarantees the rights to receive information, freedom of expression, and the right to freedom of expression.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the Law "On Information"<sup>8</sup> and the Law "On Principles and Guarantees of Freedom of Information"<sup>9</sup> define the freedoms of citizens and state control mechanisms in the digital information space. The Law "On Guarantees and Freedom of Information"<sup>10</sup> legally strengthens the ability of journalists to obtain information from sources. In this regard, the Law "On Protection of Journalistic Activities"<sup>11</sup> guarantees the professional activities of journalists on a legal basis, ensures their free dissemination of information and serving the interests of society. Also, the Law "On Copyright and Related Rights"<sup>12</sup> protects creative work, which is of particular importance in ensuring the copyright of subjective texts created in

<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe. (1950, November 4). European Convention on Human Rights. – URL: <https://www.echr.coe.int/european-convention-on-human-rights>.

<sup>3</sup> International Federation of Journalists. (1983). Declaration of principles on the conduct of journalists. – URL: <https://www.ifj.org/who/rules-and-policy/global-charter-of-ethics-for-journalists>.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (1978). Declaration on the safety of journalists. – URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/basic-texts>.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (1991). Recommendation concerning the status of the journalist. – URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/dg-report-safety-journalists>.

<sup>6</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). (1990s). Media freedom guidelines. – URL: <https://www.osce.org/fom/13004>.

<sup>7</sup> O'zbekiston Respublikasi Konstitutsiyasi. – URL: <https://lex.uz/docs/-6445145>.

<sup>8</sup> O'zbekiston Respublikasi "Axborotlashtirish to'g'risida"gi qonun. – URL: <https://lex.uz/docs/-83472>.

<sup>9</sup> O'zbekiston Respublikasi "Axborotlashtirish to'g'risida"gi qonun. – URL: <https://lex.uz/docs/-83472>.

<sup>10</sup> O'zbekiston Respublikasi "Axborot olish kafolatlari va erkinligi to'g'risida"gi qonun. – URL: <https://lex.uz/docs/-1319>.

<sup>11</sup> O'zbekiston Respublikasi "Jurnalistik faoliyatni himoya qilish to'g'risida"gi qonun. – URL: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/9540>.

<sup>12</sup> O'zbekiston Respublikasi "Mualliflik huquqi va turdosh huquqlar to'g'risida"gi qonun. – URL: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/-1022944>.

the style of gonzo. The Law "On Mass Media"<sup>13</sup> determines the legal status, registration and procedure for the activities of media entities, and controls order and responsibility in the information space. Finally, the "Code of Ethics for Journalists"<sup>14</sup> as a document defining ethical norms strengthens the impartiality, truthfulness and responsibility of journalists to society in the dissemination of information. These normative documents constitute the main legal basis for analyzing the aspects of gonzo journalism related to subjectivity, ethical boundaries and information security. In order to demonstrate the practical manifestation of these legal foundations, we turn to the analysis of real examples and experiences.

The news program "Millar," broadcast in Uzbekistan, occupies a special place among the Milliy TV channel's programs covering socio-political topics. It has approximately 25,000 subscribers on Telegram and 27,500 on YouTube (as of September 2025). This project strives to provide timely coverage of events, highlight problematic situations, and generate public outcry. The program makes extensive use of live footage from the scene, eyewitness accounts, and the opinions of victims or interested parties, all of which have a strong emotional impact on viewers. These features are combined with certain characteristics of gonzo journalism—internal coverage, a subjective tone, and a focus on the perspectives of those involved. At the same time, "Millar" functions more like a classic news program, without overemphasizing the journalist's personal involvement or the author's voice. Thus, "Millar" can be considered a format that enhances the emotional and polemical approach in the national information space, partially overlapping with the methodology of gonzo journalism.

One of the key features of the "Millar" TV program's reporting is the sensationalism and drama of its presentation. From the headlines to the program content, it focuses on tragic events, incidents involving violence and death. Furthermore, virtually every episode features staged footage related to this topic: for example, in news stories about water, the reporter dives into the water and films the action, while in scandalous events, a fake scandal is staged. This approach can be compared to certain aspects of gonzo journalism, as in this case, the journalist "enters" the scene and strives to convey the information as vividly as possible through direct participation. At the same time, a number of ethical and information security concerns arise.

Firstly, excessive dramatization of tragic events can be seen as offensive to the feelings of the relatives of the victims and the general public.

Secondly, the intersection of facts and emotions undermines the credibility of news, increasing the risk of panic or misperception among the audience.

Thirdly, the staging practice contradicts the criteria of objectivity used in traditional journalism and undermines professional ethics.

Thus, although the gonzo journalism approach in the case of "Millar" is effective in attracting audiences and capturing a vivid image of the event, its drawback is that it negatively impacts ethical principles and the credibility of information.

The report "Children Drowned in Pool," broadcast on the Millar program on July 14, 2025, became the subject of serious debate in terms of journalistic ethics and information security standards. Although the report, presented at the beginning as a staged scenario—"a mother is sitting at home with a friend, chatting and eating

<sup>13</sup> O'zbekiston Respublikasi "Ommaviy axborot vositalari to'g'risida"gi qonun. – URL: <https://lex.uz/docs/-1106870>.

<sup>14</sup> O'zbekiston Respublikasi "Jurnalistlarning Kasb etikasi kodeksi". – URL: <https://old.gov.uz/uz/news/view/23368>.

pistachios, when she suddenly discovers her children are drowning"—was intended to dramatize the information and engage the audience, it was perceived as a mockery of human tragedy, contrary to the fundamental professional principles of journalism. The report focused on a very serious incident—the drowning of seven children in a pool in Tashkent, two of whom died and the rest were hospitalized in serious condition. The audience viewed this approach as "mockery of a mother's pain," "treating the tragedy as a form of brainwashing," and "a departure from the humane criteria of journalism." This situation completely contradicts the principles of impartiality, truthfulness, and objectivity established by the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Mass Media," as well as the principles of respect for human dignity and worth enshrined in the "Code of Professional Ethics for Journalists" and the rules of "compliance with ethics and humanism when covering tragic events." Furthermore, sensationalizing information through staging diminishes the socio-political significance of the event and brings it closer to entertainment content. Thus, this report reveals not only a lack of journalistic skill but also pressing issues related to information security and the media's social responsibility to society.

The activities of Uzbek media during the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed a number of pressing issues in the dissemination of information. Specifically, in March 2020, virtually all media outlets published news of the first patient diagnosed with coronavirus infection in our country, revealing not only epidemiological indicators but also identifying information. This approach attracted attention because it violates journalistic ethics, human rights principles, and international standards for

information dissemination. For example, the practices of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Convention on Human Rights strictly regulate patient privacy, the confidentiality of medical data, and the media's obligation not to disclose such information. From this perspective, this experience observed in Uzbek media has intensified discussions about the compliance of national information policy and ethical norms with international standards. At the same time, this situation has demonstrated the fragile balance between the state's need to provide timely information and the protection of citizens' privacy during a pandemic.

The practice of identifying the first coronavirus patient varies across countries. For example, in China, as reported by The Paper, a woman named Wei, a crab vendor at the Huanan Market in Wuhan, became the first person infected with the coronavirus. She disclosed personal information, such as her name, occupation, and hospitalization dates. Such disclosure could violate patient privacy and, as a result, increase the risk of stigma. Another example is South Korea, where information about the first confirmed patients was released by government health authorities, but their personal details (name, address, and other specific information) were often kept confidential. In the case of Italy, the first patient infected with coronavirus in the Lombardy region, the first major epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe – the "Codogno patient" (Mattia) – was announced in the media, with some personal information, but completely anonymously.<sup>15</sup>

Media sources provided details such as the patient's age, the onset of symptoms, and when they were hospitalized, but withheld information such as their full name and

<sup>15</sup> "I Can't Stop Thinking About Patient One", – URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/04/italy-patient-one-family-coronavirus-covid19/610039/?utm>

address. In the United States, when the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was announced, media outlets reported the diagnosis date and clinical course of the disease, but did not disclose the individual's full identifying information (full name, address, and other personal information) to the public. From an ethical perspective, disclosing patient personal information requires balancing two conflicting principles: the public interest (infection control, prevention) and patient privacy. The World Health Organization and many international health standards require caution in disclosing patient personal information, especially if the information could lead to the patient's identification.

The study's findings demonstrate that gonzo journalism, which departs from traditional journalistic standards and relies on the author's subjective participation and emotional stance, requires a more in-depth analysis of ethical and information security issues. As noted on the Millar TV program, while this approach allows for a more lively, effective, and engaging delivery of information, it also exposes the potential for ethical violations and bias. Therefore, maintaining a balance between creative freedom and professional responsibility in the gonzo style is a fundamental requirement of journalistic practice.

The experience of various countries in releasing information about the first case during the pandemic also confirms the relevance of this problem. While in some countries, the prompt and transparent provision of information strengthened public trust, in others, the concealment or delay of information led to misinterpretation, distrust, and disinformation. This situation, coupled with the use of emotional tactics and subjective approaches in gonzo journalism, confirms the need to ensure factual accuracy and information security based on science.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the analysis, based on international legal norms and national legislative requirements, demonstrates that strengthening ethical principles in gonzo journalism, ensuring the reliability of sources, and ensuring information security are of strategic importance for the sustainable development of modern journalism. This approach not only contributes to the professionalization of journalistic activity but also to the development of information culture, trust, and social stability in society.

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